

Urban RESEARCH Monitor

Selected Housing Research

The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in the Social Services Sector

The 1996 National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients: A Comparison of Faith-Based and Secular Non-Profit Programs

Laudan Y. Aron and Patrick T. Sharkey
Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (March 19, 2002)
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/bsp/homelessness/NSHAPC02/>

Collaborations Catalogue: A Report on Charitable Choice Implementation in 15 States

Amy L. Sherman
Source: Hudson Institute (2002)
www.budsonfaithincommunities.org

Introduction

Faith-based organizations have a long history of delivering social services to communities in need. With the recent opening of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, there is renewed interest in how the government works with organizations of faith. The Office is charged

with strengthening local and faith-based service organizations and removing barriers that prevent them from receiving federal funds. This effectively builds upon the provision of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act known as "charitable choice," which enables religious organizations to compete for federal funds in certain programs on the same basis as other social service providers. Two recent reports shed light on the role of faith-based organizations as compared with other service providers, and examine the extent to which governments are working with faith-based organizations.

The first report, "The 1996 National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients: A Comparison of Faith-Based and Secular Non-Profit Programs," compares faith-based and secular nonprofit organizations' involvement in delivering homeless assistance. Published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), this study found that both faith-based and secular organizations are essential to the provision of homeless assistance, because each is unique in the services they provide and the client needs they serve.

The second report, "Collaborations Catalogue: A Report on Charitable Choice Implementation in 15 States," explores partnerships between states and faith-based organizations and imparts a better understanding of states' response to existing charitable choice legislation. The study shows a marked increase in both the number and total value of financial contracts between faith-based organizations and state and local governments. Together, these reports contribute to our under-

standing of the current roles and responsibilities of faith-based organizations.

Faith-Based Organizations Actively Provide Basic Homeless Services

The HHS study suggests that faith-based organizations are significant providers of assistance to homeless people and families across all categories of programs. The results indicate that faith-based organizations are particularly active in providing food and other basic services, but are less likely to offer specialized services or reach a specific clientele.

Using data collected through the 1996 National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC), the HHS study draws comparisons between faith-based and secular nonprofit organizations. NSHAPC is a nationally representative survey that documents nearly 40,000 programs which provide homeless assistance. The data enable comparisons across several components of homeless services, including the types of programs, types of clients served and their needs, program emphasis, and whether the program receives government funds. The study also examines findings in different geographical regions and in urban versus rural settings.

Study findings include the following:

- Faith-based organizations administer more than one-half of all food programs and approximately one-quarter of housing programs, including emergency shelters, transitional housing, and voucher distribution programs.

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- Secular nonprofits operate the majority of all housing programs and almost 40 percent of health programs.
- Faith-based organizations play larger roles in urban areas than in rural areas, accounting for 63 percent of all central city food programs, but only 38 percent of rural food programs.

In general, the data show that faith-based organizations serve a wider range of client types, but allows that this may be shaped by the diversity of individuals served through food assistance programs. For individual programs such as housing or health care, the study shows that secular nonprofits are more likely than faith-based organizations to serve women with children and other special populations.

Matters of Funding

The HHS study illuminates a difference in the receipt of government funding. The research showed that 62 percent of faith-based organizations reported receiving no federal, state, or local government funding. However, more than 75 percent of secular nonprofits reported that they do receive government funding. The authors state that a portion of the funding difference may be related to the dissimilar programs that the organizations tend to operate, since food programs are less likely to receive government assistance in comparison to housing programs. It should also be noted that funding to faith-based organizations has likely increased since the time of the data collection, because there has been more time for the implementation of charitable choice provisions. The authors suggest that future studies explore how the type of assistance provided relates to the amount and sources of funding.

The second study, “Collaborations Catalogue,” explores the overall shared efforts between government and the faith community in providing social services. Specifically, the research reviews contracts between government social welfare entities and faith-based organizations to examine the progress of charitable choice implementation since 2000. The report is restricted to collaborations under the four federal programs impacted by charitable choice legislation.¹

The 2002 findings reveal a substantial increase in federally funded faith-based activities, documenting more than 726 examples of collaboration between government and faith-based service providers, totaling more than \$123 million. In California, the state with the largest quantity of contracts in 2000, the number of faith-based contracts increased from 11 to 107, while the total value of those contracts grew from approximately \$1.8 million to \$15.6 million.

States Find New Partners

In addition to significant increases in the number of contracts and the amount of funding awarded to faith-based organizations, the Collaborations Catalogue highlights an increase in the diversity of social services offerings and the amount of outreach to new service providers. The contracts in the 2002 report cover almost 40 different types of social services, compared with only seven categories of service in the 2000 study. The Collaborations Catalogue also reports that, for those organizations which could be classified, more than half were thought to be new to government contracting. Another interesting finding is that 22 percent of the organizations that were awarded government contracts are congregations, rather than faith-based nonprofits.

Future Research

Authors of both research efforts point to future studies that would further contribute to an understanding of the issues surrounding the funding of faith-based organizations by government entities. The HHS study calls for further research of its findings pertaining to faith-based and secular nonprofit organizations' delivery of homeless assistance. Follow-up to the Collaborations Catalogue is scheduled for release in September 2002. The follow-up study will report findings from the first major survey of faith-based organizations working with governments under charitable choice to present the challenges faith-based organizations and government officials experience in building their partnerships.

¹These programs are: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Welfare to Work (WtW), the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

New Research

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Affordable Housing and Smart Growth: Making the Connection

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DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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Cordero-Guzman, Hector R. New York, NY: Community Development Research Center, Robert J. Milano Graduate School of Management and Urban Policy, New School University, 2001.

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